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AUTHOR Golan, Shari; Williamson, Cynthia
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the involvement of 462 teachers in school-linked service efforts (such as provision of medical care, parenting education, and counseling at the school site) in 77 schools throughout California. The survey found that the teachers participated in an average of 2.7 types of training activities concerning school-linked services. Teachers most frequently participated in information sessions about the services or in training on ways to identify students for referral to school-linked services. Fifty-nine percent of the teachers reported feeling very or somewhat well-informed about school-linked services. Forty-seven percent felt very or somewhat involved in activities related to school-linked services. Teachers reported increases in involvement in meetings concerning students' noneducational needs, frequency of communication with service agency staff and students' family members, and frequency of referring students to noneducational services. Teachers perceived that services available to students had improved a little. They felt slightly more positive about their abilities to help students. Teachers who participated in more training activities were more likely to report feeling more informed about and involved in school-linked services than those who participated in fewer training sessions. Implications for incorporating teacher involvement into design of school-linked service programs are noted. (JDD)

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TEACHERS MAKE SCHOOL-LINKED SERVICES WORK

Prepared by:

Shari Golan
Cynthia Williamson

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333 Ravenswood Avenue • Menlo Park, CA 94025-3493 • (415) 326-6200 • FAX: (415) 326-5512 • Telex: 334486

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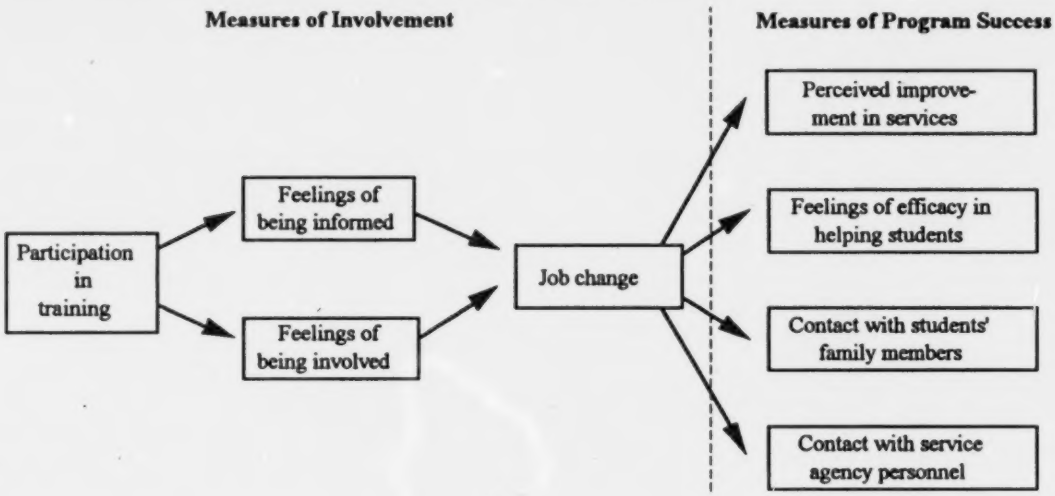
Teachers Make School-Linked Services Work

A unique effort within the school reform movement, known as school-linked services, is the latest attempt at combating recent declines in children's economic and social conditions as well as in school performance. Schools that are a part of this movement work to improve children's educational, social, and economic standings by serving as the hub for the coordination and provision of nonacademic services. For example, some schools have established family resource centers that serve students and their families on a walk-in or referral basis. These centers commonly offer an array of services such as school-related counseling, food distribution, parenting education, physical examinations, acute medical care, and individual and family therapy. The services are usually provided at the school site by staff from a variety of agencies such as the local Departments of Health, Mental Health, and Social Services, other government agencies, community-based organizations, private practitioners, as well as schools and their districts. To coordinate the multiple services and providers, schools typically employ case managers or use multidisciplinary teams, such as "Student Study Teams," who meet to discuss families' service plans.

The premise for this type of reform is that schools cannot succeed at educating students as long as students' basic needs are not met. However, it has also been argued that meeting students' basic needs without gaining teacher support and involvement will result in ineffective, "add-on" programs that do little to affect students' social conditions or educational outcomes (Jehl & Kirst, 1992; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1993). That is, if teachers are not made aware of what services are available or how to get access to services for their students and their families, and if they do not receive feedback about students they have referred for services, then how can teachers facilitate or support school-linked services? As one teacher at a school site with school-linked services commented on an independent survey, "How can we help if we are left out? There is a big deficit happening here."

This study examines the involvement of 462 teachers in school-linked service efforts in 77 schools throughout California. Specifically, we examine how involvement of teachers in school-linked service activities affects their jobs and perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the services being offered. Our hypothesis was that teachers who participated in more trainings about how they could support school-linked services would feel more informed and involved in such activities than those who participated in fewer trainings. Moreover, we expected that these same teachers would be more likely to change their jobs in ways that support school-linked services. Finally, we believed that teachers who changed their jobs in this manner also would be more likely to report positive program effects such as a sense of increased efficacy about their own abilities to meet students' needs, overall improvement in services available for students (including increased number or level of services available to students through the school, accessibility of services to students, emphasis on serving families, quality of services available to students, and emphasis on preventive services), and greater amounts of contact and communication with parents and service agency personnel.

The following diagram illustrates our model of how we think teacher involvement influences the effectiveness of school-linked service programs.


Measures of Involvement
Measures of Program Success
Participation in training
Feelings of being informed
Feelings of being involved
Job change
Perceived improvement in services
Feelings of efficacy in helping students
Contact with students' family members
Contact with service agency personnel

Methods

In June 1992, as part of the Healthy Start Initiative, 40 operational sites throughout California were funded by the Foundation Consortium for School-Linked Services and the California Department of Education to begin a 3-year effort to restructure the education, health, and social service systems in their communities to provide children and families with easier access to a broader array of services through schools. As part of an early process evaluation of these sites, 660 classroom teachers were randomly selected and surveyed by mail in the spring of 1993 about their jobs and their participation in local school-linked service programs. Seventy percent of the teachers (including 372 general, 18 special, 44 Chapter 1, and 28 bilingual education teachers) who were mailed surveys returned completed surveys (n=462).

Results

In this section, we describe how teachers are involved in school-linked service efforts and discuss the model of how we think teacher involvement influence the effectiveness of school-linked service programs.

How Teachers Are Involved

We measured teacher involvement in three areas: participation in trainings related to school-linked services, feelings of being informed and involved in school-linked service efforts, and job changes related to school-linked service efforts.

Participation in Training. Teachers in our study participated in an average of 2.7 (SD=1.8) types of training activities. Eighteen percent of teachers did not participate in any trainings. An additional 18% participated in only one type of training. However, the majority of teachers (64%) participated in two or more types of training (see Table 1).

Table 1

Number of Trainings Attended: Frequencies

Number of trainings	Percent who attended
None	18
One	18
Two	24
Three	18
Four or more	22

Teachers most frequently participated in information sessions about school-linked services (73%) or in trainings on ways to identify students for referral to school-linked services (54%). Fewer teachers participated in conferences on collaboration with other agencies or on school-linked services (44%), trainings in other agencies' services or procedures (30%), or trainings in case management (19%) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participation in Trainings by Content Areas: Frequencies

	Percent who attended
Information sessions about school-linked services	73
Trainings on identifying students for referral to school-linked services	54
Conferences on collaboration	44
Trainings on agency and service provider procedures	30
Trainings in case management	19

Feelings of Being Informed/Involved. More than half of the teachers (59%) reported feeling very or somewhat well informed about school-linked services (see Table 3). Slightly fewer than half the teachers (47%) felt very or somewhat involved in activities related to school-linked services. Although feeling informed and involved are highly related to each other ($r = .57$, $p < .0001$), they are not synonymous. Feeling informed appears to be a requisite of feeling involved, but being informed does not necessarily lead to becoming involved.

Table 3

Feeling Informed and Involved: Frequencies

	Percent who felt:	
	Informed	Involved
Very much	16.4	7.9
Somewhat	42.5	38.6
A little bit	26.7	41.2
Not at all	14.4	12.3

Job Change. A job change subscale was created for each teacher by calculating the average ratings of the following six items: awareness of services or resources in the community; involvement in meeting students' noneducational needs; frequency of communications with staff from health, social, or human service agencies about students; frequency of discussions of relevant information about students with other school staff; frequency with which students are referred for noneducational services; and frequency of communication with family members of students. Teachers reported the amount of change on a 5-point scale (which was reversed so that higher numbers indicate greater increases), where 5 = "Increased a lot," 4 = "Increased a little," 3 = "No change," 2 = "Decreased a little," and 1 = "Decreased a lot." The average rating of 3.8 for overall job change since last year indicates that the teachers felt that the above aspects of their job had increased a little (see Table 4).

Table 4

Job Changes to Support School-Linked Services: Means and Standard Deviations

	M	SD
Reported increases in:		
Awareness of services and resources	3.97	.81
Involvement in meetings students non-educational needs	3.83	.76
Frequency of communication with service agency staff	3.80	.80
Frequency with which discuss students with other school staff	3.76	.80
Frequency with which refer students to non-educational services	3.74	.83
Frequency with which communicate with family members	3.64	.83
Overall job changes to support school-linked services	3.89	.57

Note. Five-point scale is reversed so that higher numbers indicate greater increases.

Relationships between Teacher Involvement and Program Success

We measured program success using four variables that we believe should be present in school-linked service programs at this early stage (i.e., after less than a year of being operational): 1) perceived improvements in services available to students, 2) increased feelings among teachers that they can help their students, 3) increased contact and communication between teachers and students' family members, and 4) increased communication and contact between teachers and service agency personnel. Immediately following is a discussion of each of these program success variables. We conclude with a discussion about how these indicators of program success relate to teacher involvement.

Improvements in Services Available to Students. Teachers were asked to rate the extent to which several aspects of services at their schools had changed. This was done on a 5-point scale (which was reversed so that higher numbers indicate greater increases), where "5 = Increased a lot," "4 = Increased a little," "3 = No change," "2 = Decreased a little," and "1 = Decreased a lot." As can be noted in Table 5, teachers perceived services as improving a little across several dimensions.

Table 5

Improvements in Services: Means and Standard Deviations

	M	SD
Number and level of services available	4.05	.98
Accessibility of services to students	3.99	.94
Emphasis on serving families and not just individuals	3.96	.85
Quality of services available to students	3.92	.94
Emphasis on preventive services and not just crisis intervention	3.86	.82
School's ability to meet student service needs	3.85	.89
Cultural appropriateness of services	3.71	.83
Overall improvement in services	3.91	.74

Note. Five-point scale is reversed so that higher numbers indicate greater increases.

Efficacy Regarding Ability to Help Students. Overall, teachers reported feeling slightly more positive about their current abilities to help students compared with last year (M = 2.3, SD = .5) on a 3-point scale, where "3 = Became more positive," "2 = Stayed the same," and "1 = Became more negative." Specifically, they felt more positive about the statement "I believe *I* can and do help the students I work with."

Communication with Students' Family Members and Service Agency Personnel. In addition to being asked whether the amount of contact they had with students' family members and service agency personnel had increased (as reported in the section titled *Job Change*), teachers were asked how much contact they had with these parties. In this way, we could determine whether perceived increases were resulting in more actual contacts, an outcome we would consider a program success. To examine levels of parent contact, a subscale was created for each teacher by calculating the average ratings of the following four items: written correspondence, telephone conversations, in-person conversations/conferences at school, and in-person conversations outside the school (e.g., home visits). In addition, teachers were asked, "How often do you communicate with staff from health, social, or human service agencies (public or private) about students you work with?" Overall, teachers reported that written, telephone, and in-school contact with students' family members occurred monthly, while out-of-school contact occurred only one to two times a year. This resulted in an overall parent contact average of less than monthly. In addition, they reported that, on the average, they were in contact with service agency personnel monthly.

Relationships among Variables. As hypothesized, teachers who participated in more training activities concerned with school-linked services were significantly more likely to report feeling more informed about and involved in school-linked services than those who participated in fewer trainings (see Table 6). Moreover, teachers who reported feeling more informed and involved were more likely to report that their jobs had changed in a way that supports school-linked services. Finally, those teachers who reported that they had changed their jobs in this manner were more likely to report higher levels of program success (as already described above) than those whose jobs did not change.

Table 6 presents the significant relationships between the links in our model. All of the proposed links were significantly related. Still, because of the nature of correlational data, the direction of influence proposed in our model cannot be verified. Further investigation will be necessary to determine that the proposed direction of influence is correct.

Table 6

Correlations Between Variables of Teacher Involvement

	Participation in trainings	Feeling informed	Feeling involved	Job change	More parent contact	More service agency contact	Improved service quality
Participation in trainings	--						
Feelings of being informed	.53***	--					
Feelings of being involved	.45***	.57***	--				
Job changed to support school-linked services	.36***	.35***	.38***	--			
Increased in-person contact with parents	.18***	.13*	.16**	.25***	--		
Increased contact with service agency personnel	.32***	.22***	.25***	.38***	.31***	--	
Perceived quality of services	.30***	.49***	.40***	.40***	.08	.24***	--
Feelings of efficacy in meeting student needs	.07	.14*	.23***	.21***	.15*	.16*	.23***

Note. *** $p < .0001$, ** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

Implications

The findings reported here reflect only the first year of a 3-year initiative and should therefore be seen as an early assessment of teacher involvement and its impact rather than a final conclusion. Still, this study has important implications for how teacher involvement should be incorporated into the design and implementation of school-linked service programs. Specifically, school-linked service programs, in partnership with school administration, need to give teachers more opportunities to become more involved in the school-linked service efforts. For instance, programs need to inform teachers about school-linked services, involve teachers through conferences and trainings, and encourage and support teachers to change the way they interact with students, families, and community service agencies. This conclusion is supported by the finding that when teachers became involved in school-linked services (that is, when their jobs changed to support the meeting of students' noneducational needs), they had more contact with parents and service agency staff, felt more efficacious concerning their own abilities to help students, and perceived greater improvement in and effectiveness of program services.

This study was an important first step. Our initial findings suggest that teachers' involvement affects the way they interact with students and students' families, as well as their perception of the quality of services received by students. Whether these changes will result in improved educational and social outcomes for students will be answered by the next stage of our research. This question will be addressed at the end of the 3-year initiative so as to allow more time for impacts to occur.

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